

The Living Dead: Russia's Famous Dead as Political Currency

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the dead bodies of the Romanovs and of Vladimir Lenin are used as political and cultural capital in attempts to legitimate and shape Russia's post-Soviet government. The first chapter shows how the reburial of the Romanovs invoked tsarist imagery as part of a larger series of invocations of the tsarist past by then-President Boris Yeltsin and other groups to build a new government. However, due to political tension and infighting the only group that benefited from the reburial of the Romanovs was the Russian Orthodox Church. The second chapter explores how the embalmed body of Vladimir Lenin is problematic by being unburied and being a reminder of Soviet times. Both of these chapters use newspaper articles, speeches, and interdisciplinary analysis of academic text to show how Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin, and the Russian Orthodox Church built, or attempted to build, stability in post-Soviet Russia.

This thesis shows that the dead bodies of Romanovs and Lenin have been used by people in power as a type of political currency, with varying degrees of success. Additionally, this thesis explores how these two sets of bodies demonstrate the importance of the past, both Tsarist and Soviet, in shaping Russia's government.

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1. Introduction

Burials, reburials, and the treatment of dead bodies are clear political and cultural acts. They reflect ideas of self, nationhood, and the past in a way that is difficult to find in any other object or event. This thesis will examine the fates of two sets of dead bodies in Russia; the bodies of the last Tsar, Nicholas II, and his family and the preserved remains of the former Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin. These bodies are interesting sites of study not only due to their importance in Russian history but because they also represent the winning and losing side of the last regime change in Russia, and the only two types of political systems Russia previously had. This thesis will be interdisciplinary, reflecting the highly complex nature of dead bodies. Due to their cultural, political, and personal value, dead bodies transcend history, politics, and human interaction. They are objects that once were people: they as complex as people but they can be transformed into supporting any ideology, just like objects or ideas.

Sociologist Graeme Gill states that bodies are important symbolically for four main reasons. Firstly because they have a materiality or concreteness “they have a presence in popular consciousness that is more substantial than that of less clearly defined concepts like communism, democracy and capitalism...they cannot be either ignored or summarily dismissed on the basis of being purely intellectual constructs.” Secondly, dead bodies have an ambiguity of meaning; messages attached to dead bodies can appeal to many people on the basis that different people have different ideas of what the body represents. Ambiguous meaning can come from the life of the person whose body it is, the way that that person died, or other things. Different sorts of interpretations

of the life and death of the person whose body it is can create different types of meaning of the body. Thirdly, the bodies of citizens can symbolize the essential continuity of community:

The body and its burial can provide a sense of immortality, a statement that death does not involve separation from the community, while involvement in the ritual of a burial can strengthen the sense of collective integrity and solidarity among those that remain. The living feel that their connection to the community mediated through those the honoured dead, while for the state the respectful treatment of the dead represents its commitment to the valorization of the community and its continuity.

Fourthly, bodies remind people of the issues of birth, survival, and death. As mentioned before, unlike other symbols dead bodies were once people and, therefore, there is a natural link between the symbol and the people now influenced by the body. Gill closes by saying that “for these reasons, particularly the last, the symbolic significance of bodies may exceed in impact and importance the significance of most other non-corporeal symbols.”¹ Anthropologist Katherine Verdery also focuses on dead bodies in her book

The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. She states that dead bodies:

offer us some purchase on the cultural dimension, in the anthropological sense, of postsocialist politics...They help us to see political transformation as something more than a technical process...The ‘something more’ includes meanings, feelings, the sacred, ideas of morality, the nonrational--- all ingredients of ‘legitimacy’ or ‘regime consolidation’...yet far broader than what analyses employing those terms usually provide. Through dead bodies, I hope to show how we might think about politics, both as strategies and maneuvering and also as activity occurring within cultural systems.²

Both of these quotations explore in great depth what makes dead bodies a unique way to examine the world; that is, dead bodies are uniquely able to express the less tangible and

¹ Graeme Gill, “‘Lenin Lives’: Or Does He? Symbols and the Transition from Socialism,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 2, 2008: 177-178.

² Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies : Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 25.

recordable effects of regime change. Not only do people feel connected to the dead but they can easily project their desires onto them.

An exploration of dead bodies and the rhetoric that surrounds them is an invaluable way to examine how influential figures in Russia's political and religious circles have interacted with their past since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, scholars have studied the "transition" of post-socialist countries. Some scholars, like anthropologist Elizabeth Dunn in her book about a Gerber baby food plant in Poland, focused on the economic transition, charting how formerly centrally planned economies made the change to market based economies.³ My thesis leaves an in-depth analysis of the transition of systems to others like Dunn, while focusing on "the something more," mentioned by Verdery, that goes into legitimatizing new governments. Examining conversations and actions surrounding the dead bodies of the Romanovs and Vladimir Lenin shows how those in power – specifically those in the Kremlin and the highest reaches of the Russian Orthodox Church – view morality, how people should be buried in order to maximize the power of dead bodies and illuminate national values, and the best way to remake the past.

The idea of remaking the past in this thesis comes from the book *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* by historian Istvan Rev. In his book, Rev examines how the past of post-socialist countries, in particular Hungary's past, is dealt with and reshaped in the post-Soviet period:

³ Elizabeth Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Compression under State Socialism was not only spatial but temporal as well. Revolutions, regime changes in general, and Communist takeovers in particular invite historical revision, past actions under new descriptions. New histories are made by category change. After revolutions—and revolutionary changes—as Thomas Kuhn has famously claimed, we live in a different world... A new distribution of historical objects—the events, the ideas, and the dead of the past—requires not only a certain number of possible new choices but— as Michael Foucault remarked—new excluded possibilities as well... At any given moment history became foreshortened, retrospectively foreseen in a different way. The changed perspective created new continuities, new chronologies by exclusion, which in turn compressed the elapsed historical time...Historical figures, the dead, the favored dead, have always been our contemporaries. In this part of the world the dead, any dead, might resurface unannounced any moment.⁴

Rev also specifically deals with how dead bodies are used in this reshaping:

If graves can (and sometimes should) be opened, if the solitude of the dead cannot be honored, if the past is not envisioned as being over yet, then the objects, the events, the ideas, and the dead of the past could be revisited and remade: not as double but as if each of them were the original, the real one. The object of my study is the *remake*: the remake of the dead, the martyr turned unknown soldier and back again, the criminal who is redeemed as innocent, holy days banalized, cemeteries restructured, and unremarkable figures presented as historical monstrosities, ordinary places rebuilt as sites of horror...[Rev's book] deals with bodies and objects that are presented as visibly, even tangibly, incarnate.⁵

While Rev's book is more specifically about Hungary, this idea of remaking the past—that the past as it is presented now is different from the past as it was for specific social and political reasons—and the dead being contemporaries is highly useful in understanding why issues discussed in this thesis continue to be significant. While Nicholas II, his family, and Lenin are long dead, their legacy continues when politicians and others invoke the deads' names concurrently with their own ideas, pulling them into modern politics.

⁴ István Rév, *Retroactive Justice : Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 5-7.

⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

When examining the topics of remaking, burial, and values in Russia, both historically and presently, a clear idea of how post-socialist Russia was shaped is formed. The burial of the Romanovs and the “unburial”⁶ of Lenin are sites in which this shaping takes place and are sites of political and cultural contestation. The 1998 burial of the Romanovs showcases the instability of the time, as well as the weakness of Yeltsin’s regime as he failed to utilize the power of dead bodies to legitimate governments. The actual reburial of the Romanovs showed the decentralization of political power with many different groups and people fighting to get their version of history or their cause recognized. The reburial also showed the growing power of the Russian Orthodox Church as their version of history became the publically accepted version as events. Additionally, the planning for the ceremony showed a desire to erase the Soviet past with a heavy reliance on tsarist imagery. The unburial of Vladimir Lenin’s body⁷ provides valuable insight into Russia’s cultural and political sphere since 1991 and moreover, how Russia has proceeded with Vladimir Putin in charge. While Yeltsin was in power, not

⁶ Lenin’s body’s entombment in Red Square is difficult to encapsulate in one word. I will mostly use “unburial” or describe Lenin’s body as being on Red Square when discussing its current location and situation. Lenin’s body is considered unburied by most, so any future removal and interment would be termed a burial. However, some –mostly communists- have argued that Lenin is actually buried in his body’s current location and as such would be *reburied* in the future. This will be discussed in greater depth later in the thesis but, for simplicity’s sake, I will refer to Lenin as if he is not buried. This is not an indictment of the argument that Lenin is currently buried, which I find to be a sound argument, but rather a way of avoiding confusion.

⁷ In discussing dead bodies it is difficult to choose pronouns and names. Once dead, especially in terms of this thesis, people become dead bodies and dead bodies are objects. Objects, in English at least, are not he or she but it. However, it is uncomfortable and unwieldy to consistently refer to Lenin’s body or Nicholas II’s body. The difference between “Lenin is in Red Square” and “Lenin’s body is in Red Square” is small but important. In this thesis I will attempt to use the term “Lenin’s body” but the very fact that this is a problem shows the unique nature of dead bodies and suggests the value of examining them. Sometimes, it seems like Lenin or the Romanovs are still alive based on how they are invoked and thus, occasionally I will refer to these bodies as if they are still alive, with him and her and just their names, because in the popular consciousness, it is like they are.

much was done about Lenin's body, despite a strong desire of many in power to have it buried. However, since Putin has taken office, a strong consolidation of state power shows that Lenin could have been buried, Putin just chose not to. It is this choice that I will examine as well as the significance of this act/not acting. The burial of the Romanovs and the unburial of Lenin are microcosms of larger currents of cultural change in Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union and reveal much about Russia's leadership's negotiation with its own past while attempting to shape the future.

Reburial of the famous dead happens all over the world. In Russia, one of the more notable reburials occurred in 1961 with the removal of Stalin's body from its place next to Lenin's body in the Red Square mausoleum and its reburial in the Kremlin wall during destalinization.⁸ However, Russia is not the only country to rebury its famous dead. For example, famous Argentinian first lady Eva Peron was embalmed and placed in a mausoleum after her death in 1952. When her husband was exiled in 1955, her body accompanied him to Italy and then later on to Spain before being sent back to Argentina in 1974.⁹ As Peron's displacement and this thesis will show, most reburials are politically motivated. An examination of reburials in the former Eastern Bloc shows how political reburials crossed political boundaries in the formerly Socialist states. Throughout Eastern Europe there have been many reburials of political figures depending on the current political climate. It is specifically interesting and useful to briefly look at Hungary, which has had several reburials in the tumultuous post-war era. Rev explains

⁸ Georges Bortoli, *The Death of Stalin* (New York: Praeger, 1975). 196

⁹ Verdery, 2.

that the “history of Hungary is one of battles lost... [and] normal public rituals are therefore funerals and burials rather than victory parades.”¹⁰ Thus, for Hungarians the dead are an important part of everyday life. The historian Karl Benziger expands upon this by explaining the concept of *kegyeleti*, defined as duty towards the dead, which is synonymous with Emile Durkheim’s concept of piacular rites – rites of sadness, fear and anger. Berzinger claims that the “political connection between personal funeral ritual and the state is made explicit in national public rituals that mimic the very personal remembrance that is the essence of *kegyeleti* ritual.”¹¹ Accordingly, when Hungarians wanted to demonstrate, they chose to do their duty to the dead. While Hungary and Russia are different countries with different histories, they have shared at least part of their more recent history and both needed to create a new society in the wake of the collapse of their Socialist regimes. By looking at the country that clearly uses their dead to create political and social change, one can extrapolate information and adapt it to the case of post-Soviet Russia.

Imre Nagy was one of these Hungarian dead, the most important reburial of 1989. He had been the Prime Minister of Hungary during the 1956 revolution. His attempts at reform led to him being hanged in 1958. He was buried in an unmarked grave, without a coffin, and facedown. In fact, when he was exhumed his bones turned out to be mixed with those of a giraffe.¹² His burial broke long standing Hungarian taboos about burials

¹⁰ Karl P. Benziger, *Imre Nagy, Martyr of the Nation : Contested History, Legitimacy, and Popular Memory in Hungary* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008), 7.

¹¹ Berzinger, 7.

¹² Verdery, 16.

by denying the families of the dead an opportunity to bury and remember their dead.¹³

By ignoring traditional burial practices, those who buried Nagy did so in a way that disappeared him from history and showed their disrespect. In 1989, he and those executed with him were reburied with full honors and with tens of thousands in attendance.¹⁴ As times changed, so did the use of Nagy's body. In 1989, Nagy needed to be celebrated and given the respect he was previously denied. As this thesis will demonstrate similar dynamics are at work in the post-Soviet case.

Reburying the political dead is about more than a proper burial. Verdery argues that when former heads of state- like Nicholas II, Nagy, and Lenin- are reburied it indicates a struggle over form of polity.¹⁵ Struggles over polity indicate why Nicholas II would be reburied but in order to understand why his family and servants were buried with him and why Lenin is not buried, one needs to understand the idea of a proper burial as well as remaking. Rev helps fill out the framework in his book *Retroactive Justice*, about the reburial of Nagy. In the book, as suggested above, he explains that the dead are not only our contemporaries but are remade in the present to fill a particular niche in society.

As previously mentioned, post-Soviet Russia had two sets of famous dead bodies, the Romanovs and Vladimir Lenin, which they could bury. On July 17, 1998, the first set was buried when the Romanovs and their servants were interred with full honors at Peter

¹³ Berzigner, 27.

¹⁴ Verdery, 29.

¹⁵ Verdery, 17.

and Paul Fortress, exactly eighty years after their murder by members of the Red Army in the basement of the Ipatiev house in Yekaterinburg to stop them being freed by the White Army. Lenin, on the other hand, still lies unburied in his mausoleum, about ninety years since his death and twenty-four years after the end of the empire he created. By examining the narratives and context surrounding these two sets of bodies, one can examine how Russian leaders are shaping its transition from socialism through looking at how the lives, symbols, and legacy of these dead are treated and remade. Lenin and the Romanovs have such strong images and associations in Russia's recent history. Their bodies have a political currency that has been missing in the rebuilt Russian state. Not only do they represent power and "stable" leadership but they also tap into people's emotions and ideas of morality and mortality. The concreteness of bodies allows for great political machinations and an ability for the state to build a new image for itself out of the image it has created for the dead body. Consequently, someone who died and was buried a traitor can be reburied a freedom fighter in a time that a country or group is dealing with oppression. For example, the Romanovs were transformed from enemies of the people into innocent victims of the Soviet regime when Yeltsin needed to consolidate power; this had the added political advantage of avoiding Soviet imagery and thus, not reminding people of his own Soviet past and, at the same time, strengthening ties with the Russian Orthodox Church. However, despite being at least partially responsible for the murder of the Romanovs, Lenin remains at least physically honored by the new Russian society. So far, the need to transform the image of Lenin has not been great enough or accepted enough by those in charge to remove him from his mausoleum. At the moment

his body lies, pride of place, in Red Square, his name still linked to the system he helped create. However, as time goes on and more and more everyday Russians believe Lenin should be buried in a cemetery, maybe there will be a moment when he will be transformed. By being unburied and in the public eye at all times, there is a way that Lenin's body is constantly ripe for remaking and constantly an issue.

This thesis, then, will explore several of the many varied ways that the dead bodies of famous Russians can be used to remake the past, examine the morals of the present, and attempt to create a new future.

2. Fit for a King?: The Reburial of the Last Tsar and his Family

The reburial of the Romanovs is significant as it became the first, and to date the only, reconciliation of the Soviet era through a burial of major figures. However, this reconciliation was not without its troubles and highlighted how politically fraught the simple act of burying someone can be. After a lengthy fight over where their final resting place should be, who would be in attendance at the funeral, and even the authenticity of the remains, on July 17, 1998, Tsar Nicholas II, some of his family, and their faithful servants were interred in St Petersburg's Saint Peter and Paul Cathedral before a crowd of people including surviving Romanov family members and then Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The main body of the cathedral is the traditional resting place of the tsars since Peter the Great. However, the remains of those shot in 1918 were placed in the chapel of St. Catherine the Martyr due to a stipulation in Alexander III's will. It stated that the Saint Peter and Paul Cathedral had to become the burial place for emperors and empresses only; other family members had to be buried separately.¹ Previously, the chapel only held the remains of Marfa Matveyevna, second wife of Tsar Fyodor Alekseyevich. While all of the tsar's children now reside in the chapel of St. Catherine the Martyr, only three of the five children were buried with their parents in 1998. The remains of the Tsarevich Alexei and his sister Maria were still unaccounted for (some scientists argued that it is Anastasia's – not Maria's – remains that were missing).² These

¹ Federal'naia arkhivnaia sluzhba Rossii et al. *Ritual Pechal'nogo Korteza : Ritual Pokhoron Rossiiskikh Imperatorov* (St. Petersburg, Russia: Spetsial'naia lit-ra, 1998). 9.

² John Varoli, "Burying the Romanovs." *Russian Life* 41, no. 7, 1998: 22-27.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/224004733?accountid=10598>.

missing bones helped fuel the rumors that those being buried were not really the Romanovs and also that one of the daughters, notably Anastasia, actually escaped their family's fate. Thus, even in receiving a proper burial, the Romanovs were not able to rest. They carried the burden of being martyrs; physically and rhetorically separated from their ancestors. The last Tsar and his family became a symbol for both the cruelty of the Soviet regime and the path in which Russia should take from then out.

The funeral happened exactly eighty years after the Romanovs and their servants were killed. Their reburial was a relatively modest, hour-long event, with a budget of five million rubles (\$820,000), which is far less than what was spent on Nicholas II's father, Alexander III's, funeral in 1894.³ In fact, the contrast between the deaths of Alexander III and Nicholas II is stark. Nicholas was shot and then buried in an unmarked grave, left to rot. More than half a decade later his body was dug up, examined for years, before finally being laid to rest adjacent to his ancestral resting place. Alexander died surrounded by family, in the south Crimea home where he was resting for his health. After his death, his body was transported back to a mourning St Petersburg. When describing the scene in the city, one eyewitness claimed "the capital had never been in such deep mourning: dark draperies covered many building, everywhere black-and-white mourning flags hang, special mourning arches were erected in many places."⁴ It is quite obvious that the reburial of Nicholas II only bore a vague similarity to the burial of his father. While the whole country went into mourning for Alexander III and then gave him

³ Ibid., 22.

⁴ Rossii et al, 91.

a funeral befitting his status, Nicholas II was given a funeral that, while probably grander than most funerals at the time, paled in comparison. Then what was the point of reburying Nicholas II in a ceremony that was clearly supposed to be his due as tsar but fell far short of historical precedents? Also, why would Yeltsin attend and legitimize such a ceremony? The answers to these questions can be found in the politics governing Russia in the nineties.

2.1 The Past as the Present: Using the Imperial Past in the Democratic Present

As historian Catherine Merridale explains in her book *Red Fortress: History and Illusion in the Kremlin*, the new Russian Federation faced many issues as a newly formed state, such as a rising crime rate, unstable economy, and the collapse of public infrastructure:

In this uncompromising environment the challenge Russia's leaders faced was to build a credible, resilient and dignified state. The tsars had used religious iconography and stunning public splendor to achieve this; Lenin had invoked the sacred blood of martyrs and the proletarian revolution. From Ivan the Terrible and Mikhail Romanov to Stalin, no-one had expected any newly formed regime to flourish without a convincing pedigree and some sort of mission. In the 1990's, however, the new state had few options on either score. In most societies ...shared values tend to go unspoken and are almost always fluid anyway. But post-Communist Russia faced a moral crisis. Yeltsin was keen to make sure that it remained neither Soviet nor Communist, but Russia was not European and its people were not ready to accept the triumph of the west. That left a void, a kind of vertigo, especially in a society that had lived so long in the shadow of successive all-encompassing ideas.⁵

To help shape the new society, Yeltsin relied on a very common strategy for nation

building: building on the image of the past. Throughout history, many regimes had

invoked their version of the past to help build legitimacy. In Russia, this had previously

⁵ Catherine Merridale, *Red Fortress: History and Illusion in the Kremlin* (Metropolitan Books, 2013): 371.

been done by the tsarist and Soviet government. However, for Yeltsin and other leaders of the new Russia this task was more difficult. They could not celebrate the Soviet socialist system in the new capitalist system. Problematically, these new leaders had been raised as Communists; many of them built their careers by denouncing capitalism and everything non-Soviet. One of the clearest instances of this conflict is the case of Yeltsin and the Ipatiev house, where the Romanovs were killed. In his days as the region's Party boss in the late 1980's, Yeltsin ordered the demolition of the house to prevent it from becoming a shrine to the fallen tsar. Yet, when he later became the democratically elected president, a shrine or some other cultural monument was exactly what he needed to help legitimate his new society.⁶ As historian and politician Michael Ignatieff states in his article about the reburial of Nicholas II, "[t]he painful truth lies... in the fact that the order for the Romanovs' execution came directly from Moscow, from the current inhabitant of the mausoleum in Red Square. To millions of Russians who still venerate the mummy in that tomb, Yekaterinburg was not murder but regicide."⁷

Due to this "painful truth" Yeltsin and other Russian leaders relied on the nostalgia for the tsars and imperial history in order to stabilize and legitimize their state. One instance of reliance on nostalgia to legitimize part of the new Russian state was rebuilding Konstantin Ton's Cathedral of Christ the Savior, which had been destroyed by the Soviet government and eventually replaced with a swimming pool. Mostly the brainchild of Moscow mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, the project in order to recreate the cathedral

⁶ Ibid., 371-376.

⁷ Michael Ignatieff, "Beyond the Grave," *The New Republic*, August 10, 1998.

started in 1994. During 1995 and 1996, not coincidentally election years, pensioners sat in the Moscow metro, shaking collection boxes – decorated with pictures of the lost cathedral – at travelers. As Merridale explains “[a]t the time when the Communist Party were gathering large numbers of votes, syrupy references to Russia’s rebirth and the memory of imperial Moscow, channeled through the cathedral project, served to boost the ratings of both Yeltsin and Luzhkov.”⁸ Another project aimed at literally, as well as figuratively, rebuilding imperial Russia in hopes of creating legitimacy was the renovation of the Kremlin, also occurring in the early 1990’s. The restoration process started in 1992 and soon Yeltsin had also signed off on the restoration of the Grand Kremlin Palace, which would include the resurrection of the nineteenth-century throne room.⁹ Yeltsin wrote in his diary that this restoration of imperial grandeur was important so that when billionaires like Mikhail Khordorkovsky came to the Kremlin, they would realize that “they have come for an audience with the government and not a chat with some kind of uncle.”¹⁰ These two cases show how Yeltsin and other leaders attempted to rebuild the imperial landscape both in Moscow and in the minds of the Russian people. The boost in rating for the 1995, 1996 elections shows that this imperial nostalgia might actually legitimize the state.

This thesis deals with how post-Soviet Russia specifically uses – or does not use – dead bodies as a way to legitimize and stabilize the state, much in the way that Luzhkov

⁸ Merridale, 378-379.

⁹ Ibid., 380.

¹⁰ Ibid., 381.

used the rebuilding of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior to help win an election. As anthropologist Katherine Verdery states, the reburials of former heads of state “almost invariably indicated struggles over form of polity: how much territory should we have, whether it should be a monarchy or a republic, whether or not it should acknowledge achievements of the communist period.”¹¹ As head of the newly formed Russian Federation, Yeltsin constantly had to deal with questions of polity. Even before the reburial of Nicholas II, Yeltsin had reached back into the past to find stabilizing images to legitimize his regime. In addition to renovating the Kremlin, Yeltsin tried to present himself as the heir of the Russian State and its traditions. At both of his inaugurations, Glinka's “Life for the Tsar” was sung and he took the oath of office before a gigantic replica of the imperial double-eagle.¹² In regards to the reburial of Nicholas II, Yeltsin seems to have seen what could be in Russia. After the funeral, Yeltsin wrote in his diary that it was sad that Russia had “lost the previous historical relics of the monarchy, that we have lost our sense of wholeness and continuity of our history. How desirable it would have been to have it all restored in our country.”¹³ Yeltsin was not the only one longing to restore the past, with both the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Russian Federation Communist Party (RFCP) wanting to be restored to their former glory and seeing the burial of the Romanovs as a site of contestation. Due to this contestation, the reburial, including the arrangement of it, becomes a useful site of examination to see

¹¹ Verdery, 17.

¹² Igatieff.

¹³ Merridale, 376.

what narratives were being used to in order to shape the new Russia by all three of these groups.

2.2 Tension on High

Due in large part to the conflicts between the ROC, the RFCP and Yeltsin's government, the reburial of the Romanovs attracted some controversy. Leading up to the ceremony, there was divisive rhetoric and actual divisions between the President and the Duma and the Orthodox Church. Political and religious maneuvering was rampant, with every power player in Russia having some sort of stance. An analysis of these diverse groups with opposing opinions helps create a picture of the different factions that held power in post-Soviet Russia and how they wanted to shape Russia's future trajectory. The funeral itself also caused strife. By considering the symbols, music, attendees, speeches, and even the burial place and position, we can examine what Rev calls a remaking, or what parts of history are now deemed important enough to remake their image. Due to a decree of the Holy Synod of the ROC discussed in-depth later, the last of the royal Romanovs were remade as martyrs by the ROC. Additionally, the decree made these remains surrogates for all Soviet victims.

Yeltsin seemed to focus on the use of tsarist imagery and music to help create a *shortening time*.¹⁴ Basically, the use of imagery from tsarist times made it seem as

¹⁴ Shortening of time is an idea of Istvan Rev. Rev wrote about the reburial of Imre Nagy, mentioned in the introduction and how it created the illusion that Nagy had died recently and the Soviet era did not happen: "on the right side of the square was the Yugoslav embassy, in which Nagy had sought asylum when Soviet troops entered Budapest in November 1956; meanwhile, loudspeakers broadcast Nagy's last words to his executioners, in his own voice. It was as if this huge commemoration were following his execution, which had just happened. The intervening thirty-odd years had simply vanished...[r]etroactive political justice brings the past closer to the present...By bringing back and reburying the repressed, the time between the [first] burial and the final funeral is put in brackets." Verdery, 116.

though these people died just yesterday and that eighty year interim never occurred. Problems arose in that Yeltsin was not strong enough to use this imagery. The tsar reigned absolute, at least in image, but Yeltsin did not want to be an all-powerful head of state and the tsarist history and its legacy is not for weak leadership. Strong leadership in the church helped them shape the event while Yeltsin could not grasp and use the image he chose to remake. There was also the issue with Yeltsin not being entirely blameless in the Soviet past, meaning he felt more restricted in what he could do around the burial of the leaders of the former regime.

For what could have been an act of reconciliation, behind the scenes of the funeral, a battle was waged by the ROC, the Kremlin and the other politicians, all trying to gain some sort of power from it. Yeltsin was struggling to hold onto power while the Russian economy struggled spectacularly. There was drastic economic instability in this period, eventually leading to a default on the ruble that caused major disruption in economic and social life.¹⁵

This economic instability combined with political and social tension to cause problems for Yeltsin. As well as rumblings about the ruble devaluation, people were speaking out against Yeltsin. This ranged from people stating he should not run for a third term to a vote in the Duma to form a special committee on impeachment. In June of

¹⁵ By June 1998 it was becoming clear that Russia was heading for default. An article in *Kommersant-Daily* on June 20, 1998, just before the funeral, describes the meeting between Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko and Russian business leaders on June 18. Unofficial reports indicated that in addition to discussing the creation of an economic council, the discussion also concerned the advisability of devaluing the Russian ruble. It followed a previous meeting, held on June 17, in which three of the participants raised the issue of a fifty percent devaluation of the ruble. As a Kremlin spokesperson put it, by June of 1998, the Russian government saw no other means of “emerging from our extremely serious financial crisis without diminishing the stability of the ruble.”

1998, CIS Executive Secretary and oligarch Boris Berezovsky called for Yeltsin to announce then, two years before the election, that he would not run for a third term as President.¹⁶ The economic and political weakness of Yeltsin's regime shows why he would attempt to use the reburial of the Romanovs to his advantage. He needed a major event that would both curry political and social favor and help strengthen and stabilize his faltering government.

Social tension was also high, coming mainly from the growth of right wing ultra-nationalism. With the number of organizations of fascists multiplying, it became common to hear about attacks on Central Asian and Caucasian merchants and there was even a bombing of a synagogue in Moscow.¹⁷ In the same speech where Berezovsky said he believed Yeltsin should not run for third term, he also stated that he had an interest in "diluting the nationalist-patriotic constituency," a code for fascism, which he saw as the greatest danger to Russia if they gained power.¹⁸ Yeltsin himself addressed the issue of fascism and right-wing radicalism in his June 22, 1998 radio address, to commemorate the fifty-seventh anniversary of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. It is important to note that the German invasion of the Soviet Union is a widely recognized event in Russia and what the President chose to address would have to be highly significant.

Yeltsin said:

¹⁶ "Yeltsin Should Decline To Run For Reelection," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 19, 1998. <http://dlib.eastview.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/browse/doc/13566837>.

¹⁷ Albert Plutnik "Za Rossiyu bez rasizma," *Izvestia*, June 09, 1998.

¹⁸ "Yeltsin Should Decline To Run For Reelection."

Тогда в Германии все начиналось с поиска врага. Врага видели в людях другой национальности. С другим цветом кожи. В тех, кто исповедовал другую веру. Полвека назад наша страна спасла мир от фашизма. Но сегодня именно в России он поднимает голову, одурманивая молодежь... Вновь раздаются призывы к твердой руке и палочной дисциплине. Кому-то это кажется лучшим выходом из нынешней непростой ситуации... Меня тревожит, что реальность угрозы экстремизма сегодня в России чувствуют не все. Но она есть. И это очень опасно для общества. Те, кто сегодня бредит целями национального превосходства и антисемитизма, должны спросить себя: понимают ли они, что творят? Неужели россияне позволяют, чтобы самая страшная идеология, которую знало человечество, пустила корни на нашей земле? Наш общий долг перед памятью жертв фашизма -- не дать возродиться "чуме XX века". Мы не вправе предать тех, кто однажды уже победил это чудовищное зло.

[WWII] all began in Germany with a search for an enemy. An enemy was seen in people of other nationalities, people with different colored skin, and in those who profess a different faith. Half a century ago, our country saved the world from fascism. But today, in Russia, fascism is raising its head, clouding our young people's minds... Calls for a firm hand and the discipline of the stick are being heard once again. To some it seems the best way out of our current difficult situation. Under the cover of lofty rhetoric about the rebirth of Russia and its national spirit, people are again looking for enemies... It worries me that the reality of the threat of extremism in Russia today is not felt by all. But it is there. And it is very dangerous to society. Those who today are ranting about the objectives of ethnic superiority and anti-Semitism need to ask themselves, do they realize what they are doing? Is it really possible that citizens of Russia could allow the most terrible ideology mankind has ever known to take root in our land? Our common duty to the memory of the victims of fascism is not to revive the "plague of the 20th century." We have no right to betray those who had once won against this monstrous evil.¹⁹

This speech has several components which are important for this thesis. Firstly, Yeltsin said he is against "a firm hand and the discipline of the stick" which is the opposite view to that expressed by current Russian President Vladimir Putin on the eve of his ascension to power, explored later in the thesis. Secondly, he is clearly marking this extremism as important by devoting a large part of his speech to denouncing it. Lastly, it is interesting

¹⁹ "Boris Yeltsin: davajte ne budem zabyvat' uroki istorii," *Kommersant-Daily*, June 23, 1998. All translations by me unless otherwise stated

that Yeltsin calls fascism “the most terrible ideology mankind has ever known” and a “monstrous evil.” Thus, it becomes clearer why many moderates became wary of backing the reburial ceremony for the Romanovs after it was backed by ultra-nationalists. This situation also highlights part of Yeltsin’s problem. He could not use the Soviet past as it would be distasteful and remind people of his own complicity in the past. However, the reburial of the Romanovs, which could have been used to stabilize the government, became associated with the less desirable elements of the government, such as the hyper-nationalist/fascists.

On the opposite side of the spectrum from the ultra-nationalists was the Russian Federation Communist Party, who still held some power in the nineties. The RFCP were behind the push to impeach Yeltsin. They also had strong opinions about the reburial of the Romanovs. They believed that the ceremony was unjust as they viewed Nicholas II as a tyrant who was justifiably executed. Additionally, they held some fear that the next burial might be that of Lenin’s body.²⁰

Other political tensions around the reburial involved regional power players who wanted the remaking of the Romanovs to happen in their cities. Saint Petersburg Mayor and chairman of the governmental commission on the reburial of the Romanovs, Anatolii Sobchak publically stated that he thought the imperial remains should be buried in the crypt of the Peter and Paul Cathedral- even with the controversy. In a 1998 interview, he said that “the subject of discussion may be their authenticity, the funeral ritual, but to

²⁰ Michael Wines, “Last Czar Buried: Tale of 2 Russias,” *New York Times*, 18 July 1998.

debate on where to bury means to inflict an insult to the memory of the Tsarist family.”²¹ St Petersburg was chosen to be the remains final resting place, leading Luzhkov, the high-profile mayor of Moscow who rebuilt the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, not to attend the ceremony. He was far from the only politician not attending. Before the ceremony only Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov, who at one time was thought to be next president and who chaired the government commission on the identification of the Tsar’s remains, was confirmed as attending. Even Yeltsin was not originally planning on attending the ceremony. During a meeting with Patriarch Aleksy II, Yeltsin and the Patriarch decided that neither of them would take part in the ceremony. Instead, messages from them would be read by their representatives.²² So, even attending the ceremony itself became a political act, in which by not going one could voice protest for almost any slight. It is interesting then, that Yeltsin ultimately was present at the reburial. Before the ceremony, Yeltsin and the ROC seemed to be of the same mind, with Yeltsin mostly following the ROC’s lead. It seems that by attending the ceremony, Yeltsin wanted to create his own stance on the matter and strengthen his legitimacy outside of the church. Yet, this was not a unifying event. It did not help stabilize the government, nor does it have seemed to have helped any political groups further their own agenda, as was the case in Hungary with Nagy and Rajk. The ruble still crashed, and Nemtsov and others lost their political cachet because of the crash. The RFCP did not come out ahead either, despite their strong stance against the government and the reburial. They only

²¹ “Romanovs should be buried in Petersburg – Sobchak,” *Itar-Tass*, 06 February 1998.

²² “Dogovorilis’: tsarskie ostantki zakhoronyat bez patriakha i prezidenta,” *Kommersant-Daily*, June 09, 1998.

succeeded in not burying Lenin. Rather ironically though, while the Communists succeeded in not burying Lenin, Nicholas II and his family were remade as martyrs. In fact, the only people who came out ahead were not any government officials or traditionally acknowledged political figures but rather the ROC, who used the occasion to gain more power and strengthened their move towards political power.

2.3 The Russian Orthodox Church

While the Russian Orthodox Church gained from the burial of the Romanovs, they were also far from united. The ROC was portrayed by the media as refusing to endorse the reburial on the grounds that the bones being interred might not be those of the Nicholas II.²³ However, Viktor Aksyuchits, an advisor to Nemtsov, stated that he was not worried by the ROC's position on the burial of the imperial family's remains. He said that neither the Holy Synod nor its members had ever publicly cast doubt on the results of the remains. In Aksyuchits' view, the ROC was concerned by the controversy over the identity of the remains and it did not wish to endorse the position of either side in the dispute.²⁴ This shows that the ROC was powerful enough that their view on the remains caused the government to hasten to assure people that the Church had *not*, in fact, stated that the remains were not those of the Romanovs.

The official stance of the ROC towards the remains found in Yekaterinburg was adopted by the Holy Synod on June 9, 1998. The first part of the statement was that on

²³ Wines.

²⁴ Ivan Otdelnov, "Script for Burial Approved- Boris Nemtsov's Adviser Is Untroubled by the Church's Position," *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* 50, No. 24 (July 15, 1998): 16.
<http://dlib.eastview.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/browse/doc/13567248>.

the 80th anniversary of the execution of the imperial family, a memorial service for the souls of murdered innocents would be performed in all churches of the ROC.

Furthermore, members of the lower clergy of the ROC were authorized to be present at the burial ceremony. Finally and most importantly, the burial service was not for members of the imperial family but for victims of a militantly antireligious regime. The Holy Synod also advised the government to bury the remains in a symbolic grave/monument.²⁵ Thus, the ROC clearly fixed its stance, this ceremony was not for the Romanovs but for those killed during Soviet times. This remaking of the Romanovs into political martyrs was the most effective remaking of the reburial. Not only did it allow for the ROC to reestablish dominance on a national level but it allowed them to control the language of the day by making the prayer to all the “innocent victims” rather than specifically the Romanovs. Moreover, they controlled and scripted what was to be the only real reconciliation on a national scale of Soviet atrocities. The re-establishment of the ROC’s dominance will be discussed more in chapter two but for now, I want to note the importance of the fact that its position, or what was presented as its position by the media, on the authenticity of the remains influenced the view of ordinary Russians. At the time of the reburial, many people believed the ROC was right and that the remains were frauds, though most experts accept the DNA evidence shows the remains are those of the Romanovs and their servants.²⁶ These facts, taken together, show the extent to which the ROC successfully used the burial of the Romanovs to enhance its own authority.

²⁵Roman Kostikov, “Sinod soglasilsya s patriarkhom,” *Kommersant-Daily*, June 10, 1998.

²⁶ Wines.

The ROC was divided about whether the burial should take place largely because it was not clear that the bodies were the Romanovs, while many Communists were against the reburial because they considered the deaths of the Romanovs to be legitimate regicide rather than murder. Such rifts demonstrate the extent to which consideration of the reburial raised and symbolized deep contests in the political, social, and cultural realms. The question mentioned earlier of whether the killing of Nicholas II was regicide or murder shows how Yeltsin's complicated involvement with the burial of the Romanovs demonstrates how these dead bodies become symbolic of a kind of cultural and social transition. During the funeral service, the priest said a prayer for "innocent victims" killed by the Bolsheviks, showing that the Romanovs were just the start of many. Yeltsin continued this rhetoric when he stated that by "burying the remains of the innocent victims...we want to expiate the sins of our ancestors."²⁷ This statement shifts the blame onto generations of dead Russians, allowing those present to feel innocent of such crimes. And yet, Yeltsin is directly connected to trying to destroy the influence of Tsar Nicholas II with the previously discussed bulldozing of the Iaptiev House. Consequently, the ceremony was not the reconciliation it was supposed to be but instead can be viewed as a veneration of the tsarist past by former Soviet officials who were denouncing the Soviet government. Due to the unfavorable state of the Russian economy and the Duma, one would think that Yeltsin would want to rebury Nicolas II as a way of consolidating power and indicating where Russia was heading. However, the ceremony did not cement Yeltsin in the Russian consciousness as he resigned from office less than two years later.

²⁷ Ibid.

2.4 A Burial Unfit for an Emperor

In an interview with the *Moscow Times*, Grand Duchess Leonida Georgiyevna—grandmother of 16-year-old Prince Georgy, one of the leading pretenders to the Romanov throne—explained that her branch of the family would not be at the reburial because they were unhappy with the organization of it. She cited the modesty of the ceremony as her reason for not coming; "It has not been organized in a way that befits an emperor," she said, adding that she would have liked the reburial to be organized along the lines of past burials.²⁸

In 1998, the Romanovs received a more traditional burial than they originally received; however, it was not what they would have received if they had died with the empire still in place. Firstly, more people would have cared. As mentioned above, the whole city of St Petersburg went into mourning for Alexander III while barely anyone showed up to watch the Romanovs funeral procession in 1998.²⁹ Secondly, Tsar Nicholas II would not have been relegated to the side chapel and would have been placed in the main cathedral. This displacement is symbolically important. Placing Nicholas II with his family and servants shows that his most important role was not being tsar but being a victim of the Bolsheviks. This importance is shown with the prayer being not for him or his family but for all the victims. Thus, in 1998, a proper burial for Nicholas II was one that acknowledged his importance but did not give him a funeral fit for a tsar. Instead, he and his funeral became a surrogate for all the funerals that could not happen, for all those placed in unmarked graves, for those who were not famous enough to be

²⁸ Alice Lagnado, "Romanovs Stay Away From Tsar's Burial," *Moscow Times*, July 10, 1998.

²⁹ Varoli 22.

found and reburied publicly. While this is a noble cause, it can be assumed that, had he a choice, Nicholas might have chosen to be placed where his father and father's father were buried and be remembered for what he was, the Tsar of the Russian Empire, not a victim of Bolshevism. Then again, maybe not, maybe he would have been honored to represent those who died. As mentioned, this is why dead bodies are highly symbolic and useful in a political context; people, from politicians to regular people, can project onto these dead bodies whatever ideal, history, or symbolism they wish because the person is not around to object. In context, both burials of the Romanovs showed the world what the current government thought of them. In 1918, the new Socialist government *disappeared* the bodies, much like Nagy was disappeared after his execution. They were buried in a way that showed that they were less than, that they didn't even deserve a regular burial. The reburial of the Romanovs in 1998 undid this disappearing. Now, the bodies were afforded a grand public funeral. Yet, not only was this funeral was not as grand as the funeral of the tsar traditionally was but the bodies were honored not as that of the Tsar and his family but as martyrs and symbols of all the victims of the Soviet regime. Both burials fit their different time and contexts and were symbolic of the struggles happening at the time. The same bodies meant different things and were able to send different messages.

3. The Perversion of the Body of Vladimir Lenin

As Vladimir Lenin's body sits in Red Square, slowly becoming more wax than man, the question can be asked, does it still play an important role in Russian culture? During Soviet times, Lenin and his body held political currency. Things approved by Lenin got done, even after his death. In fact, the removal of Stalin's body from their shared mausoleum in 1961 was carried out in the name of Lenin when, at a Party Congress, one member claimed that Lenin had appeared to her in a dream and said "It is unpleasant for me to be beside Stalin, who brought such misfortune to the party."¹ So, does Lenin's power to legitimize decisions continue in the Russian Federation? Will claiming that Lenin came to you in a dream still add a veneer of legitimacy to your plans? If not, if Lenin's name and body have no power or place in Russia today, why is it still in his mausoleum in Red Square?

This chapter seeks to address these questions. However, unlike the reburial of the Romanovs, there are very few concrete answers when it comes to Lenin, mostly springing from the incomplete nature of his remains. Lenin is dead but not buried, which leads to unease. It is arguable that Lenin should have already been buried at the end of the Soviet period, either in the flurry of reburials across the Eastern Bloc discussed in the introduction or, in a Soviet/Russian context, following the footsteps of Stalin who was removed from the mausoleum where Lenin's body still resides and reburied after his ideology fell out of favor. Of course, one answer to the puzzle is that Lenin is already buried, which will be explained later in the chapter. The weakness of Yeltsin's regime,

¹ Verdery, 2.

especially compared to the relative strength of the RFCP at the time, partly explains why Lenin was not reburied in the nineties, but things in Russia have changed in the new millennium. This chapter will present several reasons as to why it is prudent for Putin not to bury Lenin, under what circumstances Lenin's burial would be useful, to whom, and why a connection to Lenin and the Soviet Union might be not as politically deadly as it was in the nineties. It will also show part of the new political reality in Russia, featuring a strong central government with ties to the church and less direct need to establish the sort of legitimacy political reburials carry. In this new Russia, as in the old, the moral and the political are intertwined, and this thesis argues that Lenin's reburial functions as both a moral and a political issue—and that Lenin's body continues to be used as both political and moral capital by Putin.

The question of what to do with Lenin's body reflects the political and social maneuvering implicit in the question, what is Russia's future, also the eternal Russian questions *кто виновать и что делать?*² The current placement of Lenin's body and the rituals that surround it, as well as the possible future burial practices and rites, are all sites of political power because they connect to already established bases of power. Currently, Lenin's body is connected physically to the Kremlin and Red Square, as well as drawing political power from his previous association with these spaces. His body is also connected with the Cult of Lenin. These places and ideals were cemented to Lenin's body and his symbolic usefulness during the Soviet era. Lenin and his mausoleum—and how Soviet and post-Soviet leaders have engaged with them—are an example of what socialist Christel Lane calls “cultural management.” In her book *The Rites of Rulers*,

² “Who is to blame and what is to do?”

written during the late Soviet period, Lane focuses on the Soviet government and the rituals they used to manage and shape the Soviet people. She defines cultural management as the act of shaping informal and formal practices through government intervention. Cultural management can be achieved in many ways, such as the censoring of artistic endeavors. In some cases, governments can create new events, rituals, or symbols or modify pre-existing ones to help shape the nation.³

Lenin and his mausoleum were integral to Soviet cultural management as the Cult of Lenin, featuring Lenin as the man-god of Communism, helped to reinforce the new norms within society⁴. The Soviet government cemented the nebulous ideals of communism in the real body of Lenin. His corporeal nature, which was of great use during the Soviet period, becomes more problematic for a new Russian government because the remains were embedded with a particular political power. This power was that of spreading Soviet cultural norms. So, a democratic federation attempting to distance itself from Communism will have problems not only utilizing Lenin's body and image as well as what Lenin represents in general. A similar tension was seen in Yeltsin attempting to build political power but having to distance himself from his own Soviet past. In fact, Lenin's remains' primary use for Yeltsin would have been to bury them in an attempt to bury to the Soviet past. Yeltsin clearly understood the necessity of burying Lenin's body but lacked the political clout to make it happen. Putin, on the other hand, has no need to distance himself from the Soviet past at the moment; however he does not

³ Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society: the Soviet Case* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

⁴ Ibid., 1.

lack the power to bury Lenin, so currently it would seem Lenin continues to rest in Red Square until he is considered useful again.

3.1 The Utilization of Lenin's Body in the Soviet Union

Even before his death, Lenin's body was considered as a form of cultural management. People wanted to trade upon the "materiality or concreteness" that gives bodies "a presence in popular consciousness that is more substantial than that of less clearly defined concepts like communism, democracy and capitalism."⁵ One group that wished to utilize Lenin's body in such a way was the *bogostroitel'stvo* movement or "god-building" movement, who wished to build the gods of Communism.⁶ They believed in a humanist Marxist religion that was to be "faith in future man, man unfettered by shackles of class and individualism."⁷ This movement—deemed to be "necrophilia" and more dangerous than traditional religion by Lenin—helped build the foundation of the Cult of Lenin.⁸ After Lenin's death, the god-builders were able to create their new man-god, using his body as a corporeal anchor for their lofty idealism. A Cult of Lenin was built up partly upon the foundations of the *bogostroitel'stvo* movement.

Throughout the Soviet Union, there was always some veneration of Lenin, with it ebbing during the Stalinist period and gaining new monument in the sixties, becoming

⁵ Gill, 177.

⁶ Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!: the Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 20. (translation by Tumarkin)

⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

⁸ Ibid., 22.

much more extensive than the original cult of Lenin in the twenties.⁹ The cult helped developed the political culture and rhetoric in the formative years of the Soviet Union.

According to Nina Tumarkin,

Lenin's body was to become the focal point for the cult that followed his death. Leninism would communicate his political vision to future generations, Lenin Corners would serve as a shrine for the veneration of his memory, but the body made him simultaneously a proven saint with visibly incorruptible remains and an immortal.¹⁰

So, while Lenin's cult had other important parts, such as his image replacing the image of saints in the Icon Corner of people's homes, his preserved body was at the center and vitally important for its continuation. Lenin's body was so powerful in the cult that even foreigners remarked on its' importance. In 1928, American author Theodore Dreiser wrote about Lenin's body after a trip to the Soviet Union. His impression of Lenin was that he was "enmeshed in superstition. So long as he is there, so long as he does not change, Communism is safe and the [Soviet Union] will prosper"; yet if something happens to Lenin's body, if it is destroyed or fades "then comes the great sad change- the end of [Lenin's] kindly dream."¹¹ For many of those in the Soviet Union and specifically those who built and continued the Cult of Lenin, Lenin's body was both the symbol of and the anchor of the Communist dream. Yet, Lenin's remains remain, while the communist ideal crumbled. As I will argue, this creates a dilemma for late Soviet and post-Soviet leaders.

⁹ Ibid., 259.

¹⁰ Ibid., 169.

¹¹ Ibid., 197.

3.2 Lenin Today: Historical Treasure or Destroyer of the Natural Order

Despite what Dreiser described, a change in Lenin's body was not the harbinger of the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹² It physically endured the collapse, even if the cult of personality did not. So, what role does Lenin's body currently play in Russian politics and life? Lenin and his body continue to endure in modern Russia, both physically in his mausoleum and in the consciousness of the Russian people, both those alive during Soviet times and the new generation who were not brought up under the Cult of Lenin. However, as a new generation of Russians comes of age, Lenin's cultural management value would logically be diminished as there has not been the same active push to utilize Lenin as a cultural management and legitimization tool. It is necessary to explore if people still view Lenin's body as an entity with power? In his article about symbols and the transition from Socialism, Gill makes the point that most Russians' feelings about burying Lenin's body fall mainly into two categories, moral or historical, with limited political feelings. He argues that the political power that Lenin's body once had dissipated when the Soviet Union fell; that today "[i]t is clear that the fate of Lenin's body remains an issue in Russian politics and the body itself is a contested symbol in Russian public culture, but it has by no means been a compelling or high priority one."¹³ While Gill states that Lenin's body is not a "high priority" symbol, it is nevertheless an important one as shown by the constant questions over his burial and just the inherent power of dead bodies.

¹² Unless, of course, there is a certain percentage of wax to man whose threshold was finally breached.

¹³ Gill, 194.

Gill points to the data that suggests that today's Russians view Lenin's burial as a moral issue over a political issue. Those who want a burial most often claim that a burial would be in accordance with Christian tradition or because it is the way things are done¹⁴, which to Gill indicates it is a moral issue.¹⁵ On the other hand, most of those who believe that Lenin's body should stay in Red Square say that Lenin is a symbol of the Soviet Era and a great historical figure.¹⁶ By stating that people view Lenin's burial as a moral issue over a political one, Gill misses the fact that moral issues and political issues are often connected. In Russia especially, religion—which in this case is, at least in part, an indicator of morals—has been widely invoked in political culture so that stating that something is a purely moral issue is difficult. What is presented by Gill as the moral versus the historical is really two sides to the same political coin. One side of the coin is presenting a moralistic version of political in which people and governments do what is morally right and the other side of the coin is a historical version of the political in which people and governments do what is necessary to propagate the glory of the nation. Both of which can, and do, exist at the same time in political rhetoric but clash when considering Lenin's body.

¹⁴ In April 1999 and April 2002 about thirty percent of those who favored burial answered the question why they support reburial in a way that got it categorized as "it is necessary to follow Christian traditions." In April 2006, more categories were added to the survey and the amount of responses that were put into the "Christian traditions" category fell to twelve percent. However, Gill argues that the highest category, "It is the way it is done everywhere, including Russia," in which sixteen percent of responses were categorized, probably encompassed some results that were categorized under "Christian traditions" in 1999 and 2002. Additionally, both of these categories represent a sort of moral standpoint: that a burial is the right thing to do. Ibid., 182-183.

¹⁵ Ibid., 188.

¹⁶ Ibid., 189.

The Soviet *bogostroitel'stvo* movement is indicative of this blending of moral and political in Russia. It points to the fact that throughout Russian's history religion, even this new "humanist" religion, is used to dictate political change. While the Cult of Lenin is not a traditional religion, it had elements that mirrored Christianity and was often considered at least an imitation of a religion, if not a religion in its own right. became a Christ-like figure whose body may have died, but whose spirit lives eternally in the hearts and minds of the builders of Communism.¹⁷ On the day of his funeral, *Pravda's* lead editorial not only described Lenin as both moral and immortal and also described him as "a religious leader, comparable to but more successful than Mohammed, Christ, and Buddha," due to his salvation of all oppressed people.¹⁸ His tomb was supposed to surpass Mecca and Jerusalem as a site of pilgrimage.¹⁹ It was clearly also supposed to dictate change in behavior. As Tumarkin states "[t]he Lenin cult was less an actual substitute for religion than a party effort to fuse religious and political ritual to mobilize the population."²⁰ The cult was political in nature but prescribed what morals new Soviet citizens should have, replacing the ROC which had previously played this role in Russian history.

From its origins, the cult of Lenin was designed to replace the ROC as a powerful driving force in Russian political and moral history. The ROC has been connected to Russian government since Kievan Rus's conversion to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in

¹⁷ Tumarkin, 167.

¹⁸ Ibid., 167-168.

¹⁹ Ibid., 191.

²⁰ Ibid., 197.

988.²¹ The ROC gave the government political power and legitimacy during tsarist times, using its position of power to uphold the divine right of the tsar to rule and the God-given nature of social class, with the ruling classes being socially and politically superior to the masses.²² The ROC used their monopoly over moral values to advance political issues and uphold the unequal political system. After the Revolution, the ROC was replaced in its role in prescribing the morals of the population by other programs, including the Cult of Lenin. However, after the collapse the ROC regained its power to dictate morals and, unsurprisingly, became one of the main objectors to Lenin's unburied body. Yet, its power may not be as strong as it once was. Despite the ROC's objection, Lenin remains in Red Square.

While the immediately post-Soviet Church and government were somewhat separate, the leadership of the Church under Patriarch Kirill I and the leadership of the government under Vladimir Putin shows that complete separation of Church and State is not a goal for the current Russian government, for now at least.²³ Today, the message of the ROC leadership "is not so much religious as nationalist in content, because the missionary rhetoric focuses mainly on 'Holy Rus,' on the values of 'Russian civilization, rather than on the message of Christ.'"²⁴ Patriarch Kirill expanded upon this idea in the "Address at the Grand Opening of the Third Assembly of the Russian World," when he

²¹ Gregory L. Freeze, *Russia : a History*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 433.

²² Lane, 30.

²³ Irina Papkova and Dmitry P. Gorenburg, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Politics." *Russian Politics & Law* 49, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 3.

²⁴ Ibid, 4-5.

stressed that the ROC played a role in creating a spiritual unity among Slavic Orthodox Christians, such as Ukrainians and Belarusians, by reminding them of their common heritage. In his twenty-five minute speech, the Patriarch mentioned God three times while mentioning the phrase “Russian world” thirty-eight.²⁵ At another address Kirill:

underscore[ed] the importance of the Orthodox Church in ensuring a patriotic education infused with reverential memory for Russia’s past glories. Though he refers in passing to individual salvation, the emphasis here is clearly on the role that the [ROC] can play in strengthening the post-Soviet Russian state. Here Patriarch Kirill functions almost explicitly as a political, rather than religious, authority figure.²⁶

Even outspoken critics of the ROC admit that there are some areas in which church and state need to work together to further Russia’s interests. Andrei Sebestov, the executive secretary of the Government Commission for Religious Associations, has criticized the Church for overstepping the church-state boundary and the State for granting the Church “privileges that contradict Russia’s secular constitution.”²⁷ Yet, even he believes that church and state should work together when doing things like strengthening Russia’s position abroad.²⁸ One of the alleged transgressions of the church-state boundary is a course on “Orthodox Culture” in Russian schools. In the article “Orthodox Bolshevism,” Mikhail cautions that the legalization of this course “may lead to a new totalitarianism where politicized Orthodoxy replaces communism as the compulsory state ideology.”²⁹

²⁵ Ibid, 6.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

The statements from Kirill and the Church's actions show that they are a force in Russian politics today. One of the specific goals of the Church is to increase Russian nationalism, even among non-Russian Slavs. It is clear that the Church is using its influence to help cement the leadership of Vladimir Putin and spread Russian nationalism. Pussy Riot's "punk prayer" against Putin in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior highlighted that in Russia today a stance against the church also encompasses a stance against the state.

This connection between Church and State becomes highly important when looking at the body of Lenin. The ROC's stance on burials (and even on Lenin) is important and politicized due to this connection. However, the fact that Lenin's body remains entombed in Red Square points to the State being in control of their interactions.

In Gill's article, he points to many people favoring the burial of Lenin as the right thing to do.³⁰ This is partly due to religious belief but also due to Lenin's entombment violating some key traditional Russian beliefs on burials. In both a religious and a traditional burial, the body must be placed in the ground. In fact, there was a common belief that not burying people properly—not placing them in the ground, denying rites and denying a burial ceremony—would lead to calamity.³¹ Moreover, the ROC takes a strong stance on what constitutes a proper burial. The Church states that, upon death, every person should be interred with specific rites. An improper burial is connected to

³⁰ Gill, 182-83.

³¹ Ibid., 193.

“things not being quite right in the cosmos.”³² This indicates that burying people not only has a crucial place in Russian culture, but it is an important ritual to perform to keep social order. Thus, Lenin’s body being in Red Square can be seen as a perversion.

The question of whether to remove Lenin’s body from its mausoleum was actually first publicly raised in during the *perestroika* era and has been brought up again and again during times of contested polity. In 1989, the host of the current affairs program *Vzglyad*, Mark Zakharov, spoke out in favor of burying Lenin. He claimed it would be an act of Christian decency and human kindness, as well as being what Lenin’s wife wanted. At the First Congress of People’s Deputies, also in 1989, Yurii Karyakin proposed burying Lenin as well, citing Lenin’s own wishes. This is an early indicator that people’s desire to bury Lenin was based on a feeling that it would be a correct or proper action, a “moral” act. Thus, these early discussions of burying Lenin bring up many points that continue to reappear since; that Lenin’s burial would fulfill his family’s wishes and that burying Lenin is the right thing to do. These early and repeated explanations for burying Lenin highlight a desire to remove him from his place of glory, not because Lenin is no longer respected but, perhaps, because now Lenin’s wishes and needs can finally be placed above the wishes and needs of the people. There is also a focus on it not being proper for Lenin to remain on display, that it would be a moral or even Christian act to bury him. This can be read as a sign of respect. Other discredited leaders normally are not afforded a “proper” burial; just in this thesis, Nagy was buried with former zoo animals in an unmarked corner on the cemetery and the Romanovs were similarly left in an unmarked grave – this time in the forests around Yekaterinburg. The

³² Verdery, 45.

closest analogy to Lenin would be Stalin's removal from the mausoleum his body shared with Lenin during destalinization, as while Stalin was removed from his position of glory, he was buried in the Kremlin wall where other Soviet leaders and heroes were buried.

However, Zakharov, Karyakin, and others who argued for the burial of Lenin were anomalies in the late 1980's. Karyakin's proposal was rejected and seen as an attempt to remove Lenin's image and memory from the popular consciousness. Those against Lenin's burial in a cemetery had another point- that Lenin was actually already buried as his body was placed the appropriate amount below ground in the mausoleum.³³ This is an interesting point and one that will continued to be used by those advocating that Lenin should remain in his mausoleum.

The debate over what should happen with Lenin's remains has become a battle over what constitutes a "proper" burial and who has the right to preside over burial rites; whether the Church or the State control how bodies are put to rest. Lenin is below ground, he had a funeral, yet he is considered "unburied" because he was not buried in a traditional Russian manner. This could be why so many people advocating Lenin's reburial emphasize burying him next to his family in Volkovskoe Cemetery in St Petersburg, as supposedly he desired; it is a way for those of a less religious mind to voice their feeling that how Lenin is displayed is not right somehow. They, therefore, appeal to emotion and the idea that following the wishes of the deceased is only the right course of action to take. For those who are religious, it is easier to explain why Lenin should be removed. For them, Lenin never received a proper Orthodox burial, and by

³³ Gill, 178.

being on display, his body is subverting not only Orthodoxy but also Russian nature itself. It is a constant reminder of the Soviet past, a time in which things were not quite right, certainly for the Orthodox Church as well as many of those outside it. This is especially true considering that the continued preservation of Lenin's body is supposed to represent the continued success of Communism. So, Lenin's "unburial" is partly so contentious because it highlights the tensions that come from the actual act of burying someone. How someone is buried is a highly personal and political act. Lenin being "unburied" causes discomfort, even among those who are nonreligious. They rely on the idea of what the dead wanted to try and put to rest both Lenin's body and their unease.

By not decaying, Lenin's body distorts one of the tenets of Orthodoxy. The Church used to exhume bodies and if the body was found to be preserved, it was a sign of sainthood. Verdery states that from a "religious point of view, then, one can see Lenin's mummy should be buried, lest bad things happen, and at the same time that it should *not* be buried but be exposed under glass, as befits a saint."³⁴ Lenin's perfectly preserved body is, according to Orthodox traditions, holy. The saintliness of Lenin is probably not in debate in religious circles due to the scientific nature of his preservation. However, the very fact that the body of a non-saint—to say nothing of Lenin's role in exiling the Orthodox Church from power—remains preserved under glass, in such a prominent position is an affront to the Church. In 2005, then-Metropolitan Kirill voiced these concerns saying that not only should Lenin be removed from his mausoleum but also he should be buried on church grounds. One of the reasons stated for this move is that "the

³⁴ Verdery, 45.

idea of mummification is outside any cultural and religious context in Russia.”³⁵ Burying Lenin would seem to be an important goal for the Church. Not only can they right the wrong caused by an improper burial, but they can also remove a parody of a saint from his tomb and place him in sacred ground, allowing Lenin to be morally right in the afterlife in a way he never managed in actual life. Given that the Church and State are so entwined why has not Lenin been buried in a cemetery yet, if only to please the ROC?

It was not for lack of trying. After the attempted coup of 1991, the issue of Lenin’s body was again broached when then St Petersburg Mayor Anatolii Sobchak proposed fulfilling Lenin’s “last wish” by burying him in Volkovskoe Cemetery in St Petersburg next to his mother and sister. At the 1991 Congress of USSR People's Deputies, Sobchak proposed that the deputies:

Предлагаю достойно завершить нашу работу, приняв следующее решение: выполнить последнюю волю Владимира Ильича Ульянова Ленина, захоронив его в соответствии с религиозными и национальными обычаями нашего народа и в соответствии с его завещанием со всеми подобающими почестями на Волковом кладбище в Ленинграде.

Fulfill the last wish of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) by burying him in accordance with the religious and national traditions of [the Russian] people and in accordance with his will with all proper honors in the Volkovskoe Cemetery in Leningrad.³⁶

Yet again there was opposition. Communists said that Lenin should not be moved

because “the initiative to preserve Lenin’s body had come from the people.”³⁷ This

invokes the same imagery as Stalin did when he first proposed that Lenin be mummified

³⁵ “Call for the Reburial of Lenin,” *Times* (London, England), November 19, 2005.

³⁶ Andrei Zolotov, “Minus leninizatsiya vcei strany,” *Izvestiia* (Moscow, Russia), September 16, 1991.

³⁷ Gill, 178.

and displayed, that it is the will of the people that Lenin's body remains eternal. Those against burial also pointed out that there was no documentary evidence that Lenin wished to be buried next to his mother. Another argument against burial was that the removal of Lenin's body from Red Square would "lead to the destruction of that 'great architectural monument' the mausoleum and that the grave in St Petersburg would be a place of mockery for the remains of Lenin."³⁸ For the Communists, Lenin deserves to be treated with the utmost respect. Not only is it necessary for the country that his body remains displayed but it would pervert the natural order if he was moved, in what for them would be considered a reburial.

Later in 1991, an article in *Pravda* declared that Lenin's body was actually at the precise depth at which people are buried in more traditional circumstances, implying for all intents and purposes, that Lenin was already buried and therefore his body need not be removed from the mausoleum. Additionally, the article claimed that then-President Yeltsin was against removing Lenin's body from the mausoleum, which, while later proved untrue, added legitimacy to their underlying argument which is that Lenin does not need to be moved because he is *already* buried. This argument echoes that voiced at the First Congress of People's Deputies mentioned earlier. It is an interesting argument because, in theory, it should stop people feeling uncomfortable over Lenin's body being "unburied," because in their view, it is.

The 1993 Constitutional Crisis between Yeltsin and the legislature again sparked a debate about the placement of Lenin's body. Some anti-communists publicly pressed

³⁸ Ibid.

for the removal of Lenin's body from its mausoleum and for it to be buried in St Petersburg. Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov and Patriarch Aleksei II wrote a letter to Yeltsin calling on the president to bury Lenin's remains in the earth as was the traditional form of burial in Russia. It was rumored that a presidential decree was being drafted to give effect to this; however it was decided to let the matter go to the Federal Assembly, who did nothing. In 1993, Yeltsin did manage to cut off government funding for the mausoleum. Also in 1993, The Synod of the ROC publicly supported Lenin's removal and burial but did not commit itself to performing the ceremony.³⁹

In 1997, Yeltsin himself called for the burial of Lenin and once against the Communists opposed this move. They continued to claim that there was no evidence that Lenin wanted to be buried near his family and the Russian people opposed moving the body. Additionally, the Communists claimed that a move would be "unlawful because he was placed in the mausoleum by decision of the sovereign Second Congress of Soviets" and that even beyond that the mausoleum is protected by UNESCO.⁴⁰ Despite this rebuff from the Communists, Yeltsin declared that a national referendum should be taken to see if people wanted Lenin buried in a Christian way. However, there was pushback against that idea also so the referendum did not occur.⁴¹ After the attempt at impeaching Yeltsin in 1999, the issue of Lenin's body was raised again. Patriarch Aleksei wanted all of the leaders buried on Red Square moved while Yeltsin actually stated that Lenin was to be buried, the question was just when it would happen. His reasoning was that it is not

³⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 180.

Christian or even human to leave a body on display. In the same year, an opposition leader said that he would approve Vladimir Putin for prime minister only if Lenin's body was removed from Red Square.⁴²

Thus, it is clear that the burial of Lenin faced much contention in the nineties. Yeltsin and the ROC wanted Lenin to be buried; either to fulfill "Christian" duty or Russian tradition by burying the body in consecrated ground. Yet, the Communists wanted to keep him properly buried, on display, on Red Square. This debate over Lenin's body clearly shows larger tension within Russia, flaring up in times of contested polity such as the 1993 Constitutional Crisis. As Boris Nemtsov said in 1998, "I have a mystical kind of feeling that as long as we do not bury Lenin, Russia is under an evil spell."⁴³ This feeling clearly shows that Nemtsov feels Lenin's connection to political events, long after his death. Despite the strong desire of the president, high-ranking members of the government, and the ROC, Lenin was not buried. Even after his body was used explicitly as political currency – bury Lenin and we will support Putin⁴⁴ – Lenin's body remained unburied, hinting to a weakness in leadership in the nineties. As the removal of Stalin's body from its place next to Lenin clearly shows, reburial can happen in Russia in a political context when a political ideology has fallen out of favor. So, it appears Lenin and his ideology were not enough out of favor to be buried easily and Yeltsin did not have enough power to bury Lenin unilaterally.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Mentioned on previous page, an opposition leader said that he would only approve Vladimir Putin for prime minister if Lenin's body was removed from Red Square.

The Church's investment in Lenin's burial is important because, as mentioned above, the current Russian government and the Orthodox Church are highly connected, and the lines between political and moral blur. Additionally, the state is still stronger than the church, despite the weakened government of the nineties and the connection between church and state. While both Yeltsin and the ROC held the same view of Lenin's body, current Russian President Vladimir Putin's stance on Lenin's removal from Red Square differs from current ROC leadership, despite them being close in many other realms. Putin's actions and statements show that he believes that Lenin *needs* to be left in Red Square for a sense of history and stability. Gill wrote about one of Putin's earliest statements as President in July of 2001:

many people saw their lives as being linked with Lenin's name...that burying him would mean that 'they had devoted themselves to false values and false objectives, that they had lived their lives in vain'. He was therefore against burying Lenin because this would disrupt the social consensus and stability that had been achieved in the recent past.⁴⁵

Putin's stance is clearly different from both his predecessor and the ROC. He sees the political value in Lenin's body. This statement echoes back to Lenin's body being used by the Soviet government in cultural management; he is trading in on people's previous association of Lenin with a stable government. It can almost be seen disavowing Yeltsin's government, not just the attempt to bury Lenin. This statement implies that Putin, unlike Yeltsin, is more concerned with stability than ideology. For Putin it is

⁴⁵ Gill, 180.

proper that Lenin's body remain in Red Square, as it continues to hold what he perceives as the need of the people for stability over the need for a personal burial.⁴⁶

Despite Putin's stance on the matter, public appeals for Lenin's removal continued during the early years of the new millennium. Some reasons given were the same as those previously mentioned, such as it was Lenin's wish to be buried, Christian tradition, and that it would be morally right. However some focused more on the political issues. One official said that Lenin's body being in Red Square, next to the Kremlin, was uncomfortable due to Lenin being responsible for the Soviet era. Another called for Lenin's removal but emphasized that it would have to happen in a sensitive way as not to offend Lenin's supporters and it should not be an event which is politically motivated.⁴⁷ The strongest statement against Lenin and his mausoleum came in 2006 from the Institute of Russian History. It released a report which criticized Lenin "for leading the country into social, economic and spiritual impasse, hampering its development and isolating it from the civilised world." The report further stated that "the state should not use taxpayers' money on the upkeep, surveillance and restoration of the body, and that the body should be buried and the mausoleum demolished."⁴⁸ These objections show the division in thoughts about Lenin's legacy and his proper burial. The Institute of History has made an official statement that Lenin should no longer be

⁴⁶ This thesis will talk about mostly Putin as having control during this time period as opposed to the many names mentioned in the events of the nineties. This is partly due to Putin's control being greater than Yeltsin and also due to the current discourse surrounding events in Russia. This is not to say that Putin is all powerful or that others do not have power, just that the rhetoric surrounding occurrences in Russia currently tend to attribute all political actions to either Putin or his detractors. This paper attempts to nuance this discussion while acknowledging Putin's control.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 181.

honored due to his role in hampering Russia's development. This contrasts with the information from Gill in which people seem to want to honor Lenin's past contributions to Russia while ensuring that he is no longer an active part of history by removing him from Red Square and the Kremlin both physically and metaphorically.

None of these objections swayed Putin who, in December 2012, said that a proposal to bury Lenin "is not on the agenda."⁴⁹ In another statement made at the same time, Putin said "[m]any are saying that having Lenin's Mausoleum runs counter to the tradition. But what runs counter to tradition?... Just go to Kiev Pechersk Lavra or check out Pskov Monastery or Mount Athos. You'll see the relics of saints there."⁵⁰ This is an highly important statement. As outlined above, Christianity and the ROC have gained a stronghold in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, especially under Putin's regime. However, he is equating Lenin with a saint—this subverts the Orthodox stance on Lenin's body. In both this statement and his statement in 2001, Putin clearly shows that he views Lenin's contribution to Russia's past in a positive way and wants to continue to the same tradition.

It can be argued that for Putin, Lenin's body being in Red Square is a proper burial. The display of Lenin's body allows for worshippers to gaze upon him like they would gaze upon holy relics. Putin indicates that Lenin deserves to be exalted and glorified for his achievements. Lenin's body and mausoleum represent a long tradition of displaying power and history in Russia and also stability for Putin and, at the moment, it

⁴⁹ "Lenin's reburial "not on the agenda" - Putin spokesman," *Interfax* (December 12, 2012): Web.

⁵⁰ "Putin Says Lenin Should Stay on Red Square," *Russia Beyond The Headlines*, (December 11, 2012). http://rbth.ru/articles/2012/12/11/putin_says_lenin_should_stay_on_red_square_21027.html.

is more advantageous for him to trade on that rather than attempt to disturb the status quo. Unless something drastic happens, Putin does not have a reason to remove Lenin's body. He is trading on Lenin's body's political power and legitimacy in a way that would be impossible if Lenin were to be buried. Thus, Lenin's body continues to be used as political capital in the post-Soviet period.

However, as briefly mentioned, not all Russian political figures feel the same way. Despite a 2005 statement claiming it was not the time to bury Lenin, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was quoted on June 5, 2008—the same day he called for the creation of a museum and memorial to honor victims of Soviet repression—that the time to bury Lenin has come.⁵¹ Gorbachev said “[Russia] should not do the grave-digging job right now, but we should certainly acknowledge that the mausoleum has lost its importance and that [Lenin] must be buried,” acknowledging that Lenin's mausoleum and Lenin's body are tied to Lenin's importance.⁵² Former President Boris Yeltsin also changed his mind, stating in 1993 and 1997 that Lenin should be buried.⁵³ It is interesting to note that Gorbachev spoke in June of 2008, one month after Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev switched places at the helm of the Russian government and that Yeltsin spoke after the 1993 constitutional crisis and again following his 1996 re-election. This timeline corresponds to Verdery's theory that reburials are an indication of struggles over which form the government should take. By voicing support for Lenin's

⁵¹ “In Brief,” *Moscow News*, No. 22, June 06, 2008.

⁵² “Russia's Communists Condemn Gorbachev's Calls for Lenin Reburial,” *RIA Novosti*, June 4, 2008, <http://en.ria.ru/russia/20080604/109243012.html>.

⁵³ Verdery, 44.

burial, Gorbachev and Yeltsin are attempting to gain political legitimacy by distancing themselves, and by extension the country, from communism and the Soviet past. By taking this stance at crucial moments in Russia's political growth, they are indicating a transition in power, from the Soviet past represented by Lenin to the Russian future represented by democratic processes (no matter how removed from democracy some might view them). And this seems to be the main difference between them and Putin. Putin does not need to distance himself from Communism and the Soviet Union in the same way Gorbachev and Yeltsin do. For better or worse, they are tied to Communism, the Soviet government, and its failings. Their power came primarily from the old order, so in order to recreate themselves and survive they cannot be seen as Communists in any way. Putin, on the other hand, can embrace the more palatable aspects of the Soviet past to promote stability, even if that requires him placing Lenin's body on the same level as a saint's relics. Putin is accepting Lenin's role as both a historical figure and a key part of Soviet culture, which partially accounts for why he remains unburied. While the wrapping maybe different than the Soviet Cult of Lenin, Putin's statements illustrate that the message is the same, a strong central government is the only way forward for Russia and in order to build this government Putin utilizes some of the same tools as the Soviets as well.

Putin has been a powerful influence in the Russian government for the last thirteen years and one of the biggest driving forces towards moral nationalism. Hours before Yeltsin stepped down from his position and made Putin president, Putin "published a document on the Internet that acquired the status of his first rudimentary

political program and his vision for Russia.”⁵⁴ In the document, while stating that Russia should not have a new mandatory ideology, there was a concern that it would be “impossible to carry out the fruitful and edifying work that our Fatherland so sorely needs” while the social forces in Russia “adhered to ‘different basic values and fundamental ideological principles.’” Putin further claims that “To the Russian, a strong state is not an anomaly... a strong state is a source and guarantor of order. It is the initiator and main driving force of all transformations.”⁵⁵ In order to build a Russian identity that was both voluntary and shared, Putin decided to build “on the aims and values that the vast majority of Russia’s citizens already adhere to and find attractive.”⁵⁶ This is a strikingly different tone from Yeltsin’s speech on June 22, 1998. While Yeltsin was against “a firm hand and the discipline of the stick,” Putin’s style of governing is one that believes Russia needs a strong government in order to survive and thrive. The whole idea of creating a new Russian identity requires political power and legitimacy and agreement—or, at least, the appearance of agreement—among the Russian populace.

This is where Lenin’s body comes in. At the moment, Lenin can be seen as symbol of Communism and Soviet ideology due in part to the large role his body played in Soviet doctrine. While the connection between Soviet ideology and Lenin’s remains proved to be uncomfortable for Yeltsin and Gorbachev due to their own roles in the Soviet system, Putin can use Lenin to build a different kind of ideology of Russia, one

⁵⁴ Helge Blakkisrud, and Pål Kolstø. *Nation-building and Common Values in Russia*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

based on the continuity of power. In fact, even the one of most controversial former leaders, Joseph Stalin, enjoys great popularity in Russia today. A study released by the Carnegie Institute in early 2013, showed that Stalin has actually gained popularity since the fall of the Soviet Union, and that there is a correlation between Stalin's resurgence popularity and Putin being President.⁵⁷ It seems, then, that a close association with the Soviet era does not delegitimize one today, at least in the case of Putin, as much as it did in the nineties.

In fact, for Putin it would be more trouble than it is worth to bury Lenin's body. For Yeltsin, Lenin's burial would have allowed him to bury an uncomfortable Soviet past. Putin only gains from Lenin still being on display as Lenin's body does not delegitimize him and can be used for political capital. That seems to be the main reason Lenin's remains are still on display on Red Square. If Lenin was to be buried, then it would bring the issue to the forefront. This could cause several issues such as a resurgence in the Communist Party as their idol is buried. Putin can wait to bury Lenin until such a time that it would be more politically expedient to do so.⁵⁸

As is clearly shown throughout this chapter, Lenin's body continues to be important political capital in the twenty-first century. Those connected to Soviet power

⁵⁷ Lasha Bakradze, Lev Gudkov, and Maria Lipman, *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013): 1. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/stalin_puzzle.pdf.

⁵⁸ The danger of writing about contemporary political developments is contemporary political developments. The constantly shifting ground of global events can make examinations such this examination on Lenin's body difficult as events can change almost overnight. Such a situation is currently occurring in Ukraine and relates to this thesis. Not only is it a situation that can force the burial of Lenin's body but it also shows the continued importance of Lenin's image. During protests in the Ukraine over Russia's perceived influence over the Ukrainian government, protesters tore down a statue of Lenin. Additionally, in the generally more pro-Russian East Ukraine, people *prevented* other people from tearing down Lenin statues. This shows not only has Lenin's image outlasted the Soviet Union beyond the borders of Russia but also that Lenin today can symbolize *Russian* power, not just Soviet power.

had a pressing reason to bury Lenin: they wished to bury their own past. The ROC also wished to bury Lenin, not because of their own past, but because he can be seen as the perverse saint of Communism. However, not everyone wishes to see Lenin's body buried. For the RFCP and Putin, Lenin's body is most useful in Red Square and continues to be so for the foreseeable future.

4. Conclusions

When looking at the recent history of Russia it is clear that, through reburials and unburials, the past has been used in an attempt to legitimate present power. In the cases of the last leader of the tsarist regime and the first leader of the Bolshevik era, burial or unburial serves an important symbolic, cultural, and political function. This thesis has argued that these particular ghosts of Russia's past, have served as sites of political and cultural legitimacy in the time of transition from the Soviet era into the new millennium. The last Tsar and his family were remade into martyrs by the ROC and innocent victims of the Bolshevik oppression, furthering the agenda of both the ROC and the Kremlin. By reburying them separately from the other tsars, they have forever been marked as distinct, different from their forebears. Additionally, by using their funeral as a time to mourn Soviet victims, the government and the ROC controlled the language and imagery of reconciliation. The ROC was able to re-establish some of their pre-Soviet control as Yeltsin attempted distance himself from the Soviet past, in which he himself had participated.

However, in order for this remaking to be entirely successful, Lenin would have also needed to be remade into the killer of the Romanovs as for them to be victims of the Soviet regime, the symbol of that regime must be publicly blamed. Yet, he was not and he is still displayed next to the seat of Russian political power. Thus, Lenin's remains are still a symbol of power in Russia. In fact, in recent years, Putin has imbued them with more power, practically making them into a holy relic. Lenin is now, in a way, the patron saint of Russian power, a symbol and a legacy, connecting Putin to his strong government

predecessors who helped make Russia a world power. And the Russian government today is viewed as stable and strong, both by Russians and other governments. Whether Putin actually helped create stability or not is not the question; he is seen to be the driving force behind the new Russia, and that is what is important. His manipulation of Lenin's remains, changing them from a symbol of the past that needs to be buried into a symbol of the future that needs to be exulted, shows Putin's cunning and skill in regards to using symbols to create and legitimate power. This is a skill Yeltsin lacked; while he used tsarist symbols in an attempt to build legitimacy and power, Yeltsin did not manage to be viewed as a stabilizing force in Russia. The ROC gained the most political capital and legitimacy in the reburial of the Romanovs, not Yeltsin. This can be seen through the populace doubting the authenticity of the remains because the Church did, rather than trusting the government that the remains were authentic.

Even though he was President and had the support of the ROC, Yeltsin did not have enough political capital to bury Lenin's body. Yeltsin was less masterful at using symbols to legitimate government and create political currency than Putin. That lack was not what caused the tumultuous nineties. However, it is another point in history to examine to see exactly what happened in the nineties to cause such instability and lack of government legitimacy. Yeltsin's inability to utilize Lenin's body in such a way is a symptom of the larger problem Yeltsin's government had and an indicator of how Putin's government retains control.

This thesis shows Yeltsin's weakness at creating a new national narrative, by failing to convert the symbolic power of the Romanovs' bodies into political currency and also by not having Lenin buried. Instead, the ROC was able to use the Romanovs'

bodies to help advance their own narrative and increase their own legitimacy. While the ROC gained power and became more legitimized after the reburial of the Romanovs, they still lacked the power to bury Lenin. The only person with enough power to bury Lenin's body in Russia today is Vladimir Putin and he has little reason to do that. While surveys show that most Russian want Lenin's body buried, Putin's own words indicate that Lenin still serves an important symbolic function in Russia.

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